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AUTHOR Rosberg, William H.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Kirkwood Community College to determine if English as a Second Language (ESL) courses assist students and increase the likelihood of their academic success. The academic records of 263 students enrolled in the ESL program as foreign students between August 1978 and June 1982 were examined to determine students' sex, age, country of origin, Michigan English Proficiency Examination (MEPE) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, number of ESL courses taken, major, grade point average (GPA), length of enrollment, and status upon leaving the college. Findings included the following: (1) 85% of the students were between 17 and 22 years of age; (2) 82.51% were male; (3) over 56% were enrolled in liberal arts programs; (4) the majority were academically successful, with only 4.18% achieving GPA's of less than 1.75; (5) the higher the TOEFL or MEPE score at the time of college entry, the higher the GPA attained; and (6) 63.6% of the students had not graduated or transferred, nor were they currently attending Kirkwood. The evaluation found no clear patterns concerning the effect of ESL classes upon student success, and concluded that further research was needed concerning the value of and needs met by the ESL program. The high attrition rate among ESL students was felt to be significant and to require greater attention. (LL)

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STUDENTS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSES:

A COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

William H. Rosberg

Kirkwood Community College
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

JC 830 441

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ABSTRACT

This is an examination of the students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from August, 1978 through June, 1982. Data were collected and examined on 273 individuals. They were profiled by sex, age, geographic area from which they came to enter school, Michigan or Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score, number of ESL courses in which they enrolled, major area of study, grade point achieved, number of academic quarters of enrollment and their status upon leaving the college.

Examination indicated most to be male, 17-22 years of age. TOEFL or Michigan tests at entry had a slight effect on GPA. No relationship between GPA and number of ESL courses taken could be proven. A much larger number than anticipated did not complete their academic program at Kirkwood and did not apparently transfer. It appears that further study of this attrition rate among foreign students is needed as well as longer-term monitoring of the value of and needs met by the ESL program now in place.

STUDENTS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSES: A COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

William H. Rosberg

This study is an examination of the students enrolled in the ESL program at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It is based upon review of the academic records of 263 students from nations in which the official language is not English, who were enrolled in credit classes at Kirkwood Community College between August, 1978, and June, 1982.

Almost all accredited colleges and universities in the United States have experienced a substantial increase in the number of students enrolled who come from other nations. When foreign student populations were small, colleges were able to control which students were admitted through highly personalized screening. Students with insufficient English skills could be provided with or assisted in locating a tutor. The unique perspective brought to the campus by students with very different backgrounds than those of the bulk of the student population was seen by many academic administrators and faculty members as justification for special accomodations to meet individual student needs.

The later 1970's and the 1980's have brought substantial changes to american college campuses. The population of "traditional" students has stabalized and, in some parts of the country, substantially declined. Simultaneously, changes in relative

economic strength of the dollar since the mid-1970's have made a United States education an affordable alternative for many individuals from other nations. At the same time, demand for higher education in other nations has outstripped ability to provide places. These three factors; available places in most U.S. colleges and universities; decreasing relative cost of a U.S. education and increased demand around the world for higher education have combined to rapidly increase foreign student populations in the United States.

The influx of non-English or limited-English speaking students has resulted in a breakdown of the traditional system of individual accomodation to unique needs. As foreign students have increased in their economic impact upon and importance to colleges and universities, they have been more frequently viewed as an impediment to the learning of other students, seen as "slowing down" their academic progress. As a direct result of this increase in numbers, the breakdown in special arrangements and faculty demands for formal mechanisms to improve English abilities of limited-English speaking students, there has been a tremendous growth in service courses, offered on either a credit or non-credit basis, in English as a Second Language.

The idea underlying ESL is a simple one. Test all non-american students and require "remedial" coursework of those who have insufficient English skills to succeed in a "normal" academic environment. Once sufficient proficency is achieved, place those students in regular classes. Immediate problems

occur however. The first difficulty is definition of "foreign" student. Though the relative cost of a U.S. education has decreased in recent years, the cost is still high. For many non-U.S. students, enrollment also involves seperation from immediate family and friends. To minimize the expenses and seperation forced by individual coursework, particularly coursework that "doesn't count" toward a degree, attempts are regularly made to obtain exemptions from ESL classes or minimize time spent therein. The problem of who must take such classes is complex. The usual standard is to exempt students from testing if English is an "official" language and thereby to assume that all students from that nation speak English whether, in fact, they do or not.

An additional problem is identification of a "foreign" student. One who enters the country on a student visa for the express purpose of attending school clearly is included but how about the spouse of such an individual, resident on a visa issued to a dependent of a non-citizen? As a community college close to a major university (The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa) and to three private liberal arts colleges, Kirkwood Community College attracts a substantial number of enrollments from such individuals.

Finally, even if the ability of the college to insist on enrollment of all non-English fluent students in ESL classes is accepted, do the classes actually assist students or increase the liklihood of their academic success?

Results of previous investigations are often negative. A study conducted at the University of Hawaii concluded that ESL courses had no significant effect whatsoever (Mason: 1971: 204). A second study, in the final summary stated:

> The conclusion must be, as we had long intuitively felt, that general "back-up" courses in service English are largely a waste of resources and now we are turning our attention to small group courses catering for specific needs in clearly defined areas such as English for science (Mosback:1977:318).

Given such negative positions in the literature and yet seeing a substantial increase in both the number of limited-English students and ESL programs, the authors chose to examine the ESL program as it operated in one, two-year institution.

METHODOLOGY:

The ESL program examined was that of Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Kirkwood is part of a state-wide community college system and serves a seven-county service area in East-Central Iowa. Enrollment includes approximately 6,000 full-time equivalent students. For purposes of this study, only tuition-paying students enrolling at Kirkwood Community College on student visas or as emigrants were included. Such a definition excluded a large number of Indochinese students enrolled under a special grant for new immigrants. Also excluded were foreign nationals from those countries in which English was the official language and who ostensibly did not require English language training.

A brief questionnaire was devised and completed by the Foreign

Student Advisor on each of the 263 students enrolled in the ESL program as foreign students between August 1978 and June of 1982. Only within the past few years has the college required all enrolling students from nations in which English is not the official language to take either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Michigan English Proficency Examination. Therefore, these scores are available on only 137 of the 263 students enrolled in ESL within the stated time period. An additional problem is that the TOEFL and Michigan examinations differ markedly. For comparison purposes the following standard was used in coding scores (Table 1).

Table 1

EQUIVALENCY STANDARD USED IN CODING TOEFL AND MICHIGAN PROFICENCY SCORES

Coding Value	Michigan Score	TOEFL Score
1	0-40	0-350
2	41-55	351-400
3	56-70	401-450
4	71-80	451-525

A copy of the full questionnaire is attached as an appendix.

RESULTS:

263 students, representing six different geographic areas were included in the study. Table two indicates the breakdown by area. The Far East category includes all the nations traditionally included in this area with the exception of the Indochinese states which appear in a seperate category. The total number of Indochinese students, 47, is lower than anticipated.

The great bulk of this population were non-tuition payers, covered by special grant funding. Their records, unless they chose to enroll and pay tuition in "credit" courses, were not available.

Table 2

AREA OF NATIONAL ORIGIN

Geographic Region	Number	Percentage of Total
Indochina	47	17.871
Latin America	30	11.407
Far East	16	6.084
Mid-East	125	47.529
Africa	43	16.350
Europe	2	.760

Age variation was smaller than anticiapted. As indicated in Table 3, 85 percent of the students in question were between 17 and 22. Only three students were 29 years of age or older.

Table 3

AGE OF ESL STUDENTS

Age	Number Enrolled	Percentage of Total
17-22	224	85.171
23-28	36	13.68
29-34	1	.38
35-above	2	.76

As was expected, the bulk of the students were male. 217, 82.51% of the total were male. Only 46, 17.49% were female. Students were fairly well distributed among college programs. A breakdown into three classifications, majoring in a college-transfer liberal arts area, vocational technical program and

enrollment only in ESL classes indicated that over 56% were enrolled in liberal arts programs. These data appear in table 4.

Table 4

STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY MAJOR AREA

Major	Number Enrolled	Percentage of Total
Vocational/Technical	73	27.757
Arts and Sciences	149	56.654
ESL	41	15.589

The great majority of ESL students have been academically successful. Only 4.18% of the students, a total of eleven, had achieved grade points of less than 1.75 on a 4.0 scale. Conversely, only three students, 1.14% achieved grade points of 3.25 or higher. A breakdown of the grade points of ESL students appears in table 5.

Table 5

GRADE POINT AVERAGES OF ESL STUDENTS

Grade Point	Number	Percentage of Total
0-1.00	1	.38
1.00-1.75	10	3.802
1.76-2.50	215	81.749
2.51-3.25	34	12.928
3.26-4.00	3	1.141

The key question, of course, is what difference has ESL made on the success or failure of enrolled students. This cannot be answered in a straightforward manner because there are several intervening factors. the first of these is scores on either TOEFL or the Michigan test. As would be expected, Table 6

indicates that the higher the score, the less ESL classes have been taken.

Table 6

PROFICENCY SCORE AND ESL CLASSES TAKEN

mich. Score	Toefl Score	0-8 ESL Hrs.	9-16 ESL Hrs.	17-24 ESL Hrs.	25-32 ESL Hrs.	Above 32 Hrs.	Total Number Enrolled
0-40	0-350	1	0	1	0	2	4
41-55	351-400	0	1	2	3	27	33
56-70	401-450	0	1	25	15	9	50
71-80	451-525	34	15	1	0	0	50

Comparison of scores on an English proficency test and grade point also were predictable but, of the 137 individuals on whom scores were obtained. 105 had grade points between 1.75 and 2.50. Data comparing scores and grade point appear in Table 7. In aggregate terms, the higher the average TOEFL or Michigan score at time of entry, the higher the average grade point attained. Even so, two thirds of all students with the highest aggregate TOEFL or Michigan scores still attained grade point averages of 1.76 to 2.25.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A key question underlying this whole study is the effect of ESL classes upon student success. Unfortunately, no clear pattern appears. Insufficient variation in age of enrolling ESL students makes it impossible to determine if age or maturity determines success. The only factor examined that appears to make a clear difference is TOEFL or Michigan score at time of

enrollment. Those with higher scores have a greater liklihood of academic success. Even this variation must be considered marginal hoever because of the overwhelming percentage of ESL students with similar grade point averages whatever their proficency scores.

Table 7

PROFICENCY SCORE AND GRADE POINT

Mich. Score	TOEFL Score	GPA 0.00-1.00	GPA 1.01-1.75	GPA 1.76-2.50	GPA 2.51-3.25	GPA 3.26-4.00
0-40	0-350	0	0	4	0	0
41-55	351-400	0	0	30	3	0
56-70	401-450	1	1	38	9	1
71-80	451-525	0	3	33	12	2

One very troubling statistic emerging from this study was the percentage of the ESL students whose status upon leaving the college could not be determined. As indicated in Table 8, 53.6% of the population included in the study were not graduated, not transfered and not currently enrolled. Though the "drop-out" rate is lower than that normally found for the total community college population, it is substantially higher than the authors had expected to find given the investment in time and dollars that these students necessarily made to enroll. Possibly more extensive support service during terms of enrollment could substantially cut this attrition rate.

In the period studied, at the institution examined, the value of ESL classes is not clear. The attrition rate is significant however and requires greater attention. Possibly

the problem is that we have asked the wrong questions. Is the role of ESL prmarily provison of academic skills or, more realistically, is it provision instead of a support system or infrastructure that is an essential backup for non-English or limited-English speaking students. Clearly, more research is needed to answer this question.

Table 8

CURRENT STATUS OF STUDENTS IN THE STUDY

Enrollment Status	Frequency	% of Total
Graduated/Transfered	39	14.83
Graduated/Returned Home	22	8.37
Not Graduated/Transfered	38	14.45
Not Graduated/Returned Home or No Record	141	53.61
Currently Enrolled	23	8.75

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Mossback, G.P. "Service Courses in ESL at University Level - How Effective Are They?" English Language Teaching Journal, 313-318. July, 1977.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN DATA COLLECTION

1. Age
   1. 17-22
   2. 23-28
   3. 29-34
   4. 35 and above.

2. Sex
   1. Male.
   2. Female.

3. Geographic region of origin.
   1. Indochina (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia).
   2. Latin America.
   3. Far East (Excluding Indochina).
   4. Middle East.
   5. Africa.
   6. Europe.

4. Entry Michigan or TOEFL Scores

1.	0-40	0-350
2.	41-55	351-400
3.	56-70	401-450
4.	71-80	451-525

5. Number of ESL credit hours.
   1. 0- 8
   2. 9-16
   3. 17-24
   4. 25-32
   5. above 32.

6. Number of quarters at Kirkwood Community College
   1. 1-2
   2. 3-4
   3. 5-6
   4. above 6.

7. Major area.
   1. Vocational-Technical Program
   2. Arts and Sciences (Liberal Arts)
   3. ESL

B. Grade Point Average while enrolled at Kirkwood Community Coll.
   1. 0.00-1.00
   2. 1.01-1.75
   3. 1.76-2.50
   4. 2.51-3.25
   5. 3.26 or above.

9. Leaving Status
   1. Graduated and transfered.
   2. Graduated and returned home.
   3. Not graduated and transfered.
   4. Not graduated and returned home or no record.
   5. Currently enrolled.

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